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A conversation with anthropologist, Elisabeth Dunn, on violence related to migration and on violence on Polish-Belarussian border.

Elizabeth C. Dunn - Elizabeth Cullen Dunn's work focuses on forced migration. For more than a decade, she has worked with refugees and internally displaced people. In her latest book,?No Path Home: Humanitarian Camps and the Grief of Displacement, looks critically at the refugee camp as a space of both bureaucratic regulation and existential crisis. Using an ontological approach, she shows that displaced people become stuck in camps not only because of war, but because of the logic of humanitarianism, which traps people in states of uncertainty, extreme pressure, and eventually abandonment.?No Path Home?is based on more than 16 months of ethnographic work in the Republic of Georgia, where Dunn lived and worked in a camp for victims of ethnic cleansing. Most of Dunn's work has been done in the former Eastern Bloc. Her early work, which culminated in?Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business and the Remaking of Labor, focused on the transition from socialism in former Warsaw Pact states. Beginning in 2001, she focused on the former USSR, particularly on the non-Russian republics. In addition to her work in Georgia, she has also conducted research on displaced Chechens in Kyrgyzstan.

Inga Hajdarowicz - Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the Jagiellonian University; in her research and activism, she explores the topics of participatory democracy, grassroots initiatives, feminist movements, and migration. She has studied and implemented participatory tools aimed at increasing the influence of residents on decision-making processes in the city and the inclusion of previously excluded groups in the co-creation of the city. Since 2015, she has been using similar methods in working with refugees. Her Ph.D.

research tackles grassroots strategies to support refugee women on the example of activities of Syrian feminist initiatives in Lebanon. She is a member of a coordination group of Researchers on the Border.

Natalia Judzińska - Cultural studies scholar, works at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She is a co-initiator (with Nina Boichenko) of the group Researchers and Researchers on the Border, dedicated to the documentation and scientific study of the ongoing humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. Her scholarly work deals with interwar anti-Semitism in universities and the Holocaust and the material dimension of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. Head of the scientific project "The process of institutionalization of the bench ghetto at the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius in the interwar period" (NCN). Activist, guitarist and bassist of independent music bands, co-founder of several informal art and activist groups.

"It Is the Spectacle of Violence that Matters There": On the Margins of the Conversation with Elizabeth Dunn on Border Crises

American anthropologist Elizabeth Dunn is mostly known in Poland for her book *Privatizing Poland*,[1] published by Krytyka Polityczna in 2008. A PhD candidate at the time, Dunn conducted eighteen months of ethnographic research between 1995 and 1997, working on a production line for zakłady Przemysłu Owocowo-Warzywnego "Alima" ["Alima" Fruit and Vegetable Industry Plants] after it was taken over by American company Gerber. In her book, she offers a detailed picture of capitalist transformation, providing food for thought on the rising criticism of economic transition. For a new generation of researchers, she presented an example of how ethnographic methods can be used for the analysis of macro-economic processes and socio-political critique.

Almost fifteen years after the book was published, Dunn returned to Poland with her thoughtful commentaries. In her polemic with the American left, searching for excuses for the Russian invasion in the expansion of NATO and Russia's political and economic "humiliation," she points out the hypocrisy of that intellectual circle, which fails to notice Russian imperialism. She arrived at the Polish–Ukrainian border at the beginning of March 2022, once again getting involved on the ground, this time to explore the bottom-up approach to refugee response. It is not the first time Dunn has worked on issues related to war and displacement. Her initial plan to research food and agriculture in Georgia changed after Russia invaded it in 2008. Following an emerging research topic, she conducted sixteen months of ethnography in resettlement camps, which resulted in her latest

book *No Path Home: Humanitarian Camps and the Grief of Displacement*.[2]

The conversation took place in Dunn's Warsaw apartment at the end of June, a few days before she moved out, following her Fulbright scholarship for the academic year 2022–2023. It wasn't their first meeting: Dunn, Inga Hajdarowicz, and Natalia Judzińska had met a few weeks before, at the end of April, on the Polish–Belarusian border, where Dunn attended the seminar organized by the group Researchers on the Border.[3] During that meeting, they began a conversation, of which this article is a continuation.

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Inga Hajdarowicz: We were thinking about starting from your last book, *No Path Home*,[4] where you present a critique of humanitarianism based on your fieldwork in Georgia. You present the globally standardized strategies to provide shelter for refugees and IDPs[5] as uncanny, with rows of houses that never become homes, that resemble a city but never become one; they are rather non-temporary spaces that contain residents in a permanent state of limbo. What makes them such an imitation? Why are they not homes? Why do they not become cities?

Elizabeth Dunn: Well, I think there's two reasons. One is that they, of course, don't grow up organically. They don't develop in response to people's needs. Eventually, many of these camps do become cities, or cities grow around them, but as long as the camp is being run as a camp… the standardization of form is one reason, right? That all the housing units are identical. It's row after row of white concrete cinder block cottages where I was, or row after row of white tents, or row after row of plastic containers. But they're laid out in a very mechanical grid. They're designed for the purposes of observation, to make people surveillable. They're always designed to remind the residents

that they are not there permanently. The average lifespan of a tent is six months, and the average stay in a refugee camp is seventeen years.[6] So, like I've always said, why don't we build them apartment buildings? Why don't we admit that this relocation is probably permanent, or at least long-term, and invest upfront in long-term housing? But instead, I think for political reasons, particularly for host states, it's always important that refugees be deportable. So keeping them in housing which is marked as impermanent is also meant to signal to the surrounding community that they are always on the verge of being sent back. And I think that makes an important political statement for the host country.

One thing about the standardization of housing is that it is becoming less rare, but in general, when camps are built, they don't include the facilities that you would have in a city. None of the camps I was in had a church, even though almost all the people in the camp were Orthodox Christians. They very often don't have schools, so the kids have to double up with kids in a host community school. Or they go to school in a temporary trailer. They very often don't have shopping or dining facilities. So it becomes hard to go and just get what you need, and eventually people improvise stores out of their homes, or double up in a container and turn another container into shopping. But these are not design solutions; they're *ad hoc* solutions. So the form of the encampment does not meet the everyday needs of the people who live there. The other thing is that, as long as people are being told that they are there temporarily, it becomes incredibly difficult to make any plans. And when you can't make plans for the future, when the future is so uncertain that the risk level is high, people are generally unwilling to make investments. The people I lived with had been apple farmers. Well, smugglers and apple farmers. But they had been apple farmers, and the question is, a fruit tree takes three or four years to start producing fruit. So how much money do you invest in planting

fruit trees if you have no idea whether you're going to be there next year? I think that as long as people are kept in that state of deportability, it becomes very hard for them to mobilize their own resources as investments.

IH: Despite the critique of the camps that your research and your book contribute to, camps are still chosen as a solution in the case of mass displacement. And we could see this discussion after February 24, when, although many Polish people and Ukrainians living here opened their houses, the government and INGOs[7] were still considering the idea of organizing and implementing this strategy. You were at the border almost from the beginning. How do you see it from the perspective of your research?

ED: I arrived at the border March 9. First of all, I don't think the government or the INGOs had any plans. It's not that they were trying to create refugee camps short-term or long-term – it's that they were stunned and had almost no plans at all, which left municipal governments in charge of finding a solution. The mayor of Przemyśl[8] was getting very little help from either the national government or the voivodship, which I found absolutely shocking. I mean, he has a town of 60,000 people, but 50,000 people a day were crossing the border from Ukraine. So all of the solutions were necessarily *ad hoc* and improvised. People were sleeping in an old Tesco supermarket, and that was 3,000 or 4,000 people a night. The turnover was so fast. I was in an old merchandise market, the Hala Kijowska, which was designed for border traders, but it was quickly flipped into accommodation for 5,000 people per night. And that was all improvised. I think people were doing their best, but when I talked to representatives of the INGOs, their answer was: "we were unprepared for a war in Europe." Who could have expected a war in Europe? We don't have the capacity to handle a war in Europe. We don't have the capacity to handle a mass exodus of 8.5 million people. And they keep thinking... this is your job, and

the likelihood of war has been there for the last eight years, nine years? So why weren't you prepared? You should have been prepared, and yet nobody was prepared, and that left individual volunteers to improvise solutions. And the mayor of Przemyśl was a hero in all of this, really. He improvised a lot of great solutions with very little help.

IH: We can see camps as a way to provide at least temporary housing for people, but they are also the space of different types of violence and control. Moving on to the Polish–Belarusian border, this strategy of control or hosting people was never applied there. People on the move there are basically left homeless, left without any shelter, and forced to sleep for days in the forest. So we were wondering whether, in the case of the Polish–Belarusian border, it's actually the lack of camps that is another form of violence?

ED: Yes, having no camps is more violent than having camps. And on the Polish–Belarusian border, as you know, the violence is the point. It is the spectacle of violence that matters there. The refugees have been weaponized, and sending them across is a continual challenge to the European Union to show whether or not it upholds its own stated values. And so it's meant to be a perpetual political humiliation. It's an attempt on the part of Lukashenko to make the European Union perform violence in a public and visible way. To show that it cannot uphold its own stated values. So here the violence is not accidental – the violence is the point. Do you think so?

Natalia Judzińska: Yes. Actually, for the last one-and-a-half years, with Badaczki i Badacze na Granicy, we were discussing the role of Lukashenko in the crisis, and the reason why we turned our eyes to him. Because he also showed the hypocrisy of the values of the European Union, but it was Poland as a state that, in response to the humanitarian crisis, applied violence toward people on the move. And Europe did nothing about this.

ED: The European Union promoted this violence and basically ordered Poland to enact it. It's not accidental policy on the part of the European Union. And they're doing it at a wide variety of borders. I think the interesting thing about the Polish–Belarusian border and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the Sonoran Desert on the US–Mexican border, is what anthropologist Jason De León,[9] who studied the Sonoran Desert,[10] called "weaponizing the terrain." The US government is making the Earth itself into the killer, so that people are not killed by the hands of the US government. But in fact it is due to the policy of the US government, which places walls in ways that funnel people into very dangerous territory where the land itself kills them. And I think the same is true on the Polish–Belarusian border. The object is not to have the Polish state kill those migrants or have the European Union kill those migrants, but to use the hostile terrain to cause their deaths – to force them into extremely hostile terrain, these swampy, cold, wet marshes where people freeze to death, and let the Earth do the dirty work that the European Union is unwilling to do itself. And they do this with the sea as well. There's no reason people have to drown at sea. There's no reason people have to be in a boat at all. We have airplanes. If we wanted to house migrants and welcome them into our labor force, we'd let them fly. So there's no reason

that Syrians or Afghans or Ethiopians have to vault over a fence and then try and make their way through a half-frozen swamp in order to try and survive this. I mean, we could fly them. They flew to Belarus. But by making them make their way through this terrain, the EU outsources its dirty work to the planet.

NJ: About all those responses to the crisis – in the past months you've been involved in response in Ukraine, both as a researcher[11] and an activist. And you were writing about a new form of humanitarianism that is more grassroots, volunteer-based, and flexible. So how are things now?

ED: Well, first of all, you have to acknowledge upfront that the volunteer-based response of Poles is patterned on the long-standing volunteerism of Ukrainians, who have had this kind of self-organization going since 2014. But I thought what was interesting in the early months of the war was how flexible and spontaneously organized these networks of aid were. So they weren't longstanding relationships; for the most part, people weren't using the networks that they had, or they were using the network that they already had as a core and then spreading out into lots of new relationships. But a lot of people were just meeting each other on Facebook for the first time and then working together temporarily to achieve a particular goal, and then disbanding. So I think one of the big contrasts of this flexible, socially self-organized response is that it rejects the institutional form, or it did at first. People didn't feel the need to set up NGOs, they didn't feel the need to have presidents and directors, they didn't feel the need to have spreadsheets and plans, and this made them much faster responders, paradoxically, because of this distributed character of the aid.

Of course, now what has happened in the last… what are we at, sixteen months? Is that many people have stopped doing aid altogether. I mean, the number of people involved has dwindled tremendously. And those people who stay and continue to provide aid have found that they have to make compromises

about the institutional form. So in order to avoid being taxed on money coming through their personal bank accounts, for example, they've created foundations. They try to create NGOs that have some sort of stable structure. But I think what's interesting is, even though they are picking up these institutionalized forms, they still tend to – a lot of them tend to – make their response very *ad hoc*. They're loading up vans full of goods, and they're driving them across into Ukraine, and they're driving them right to the spot where they are needed. A lot of these people, these Poles, are going right to the front, so they're taking on a huge amount of risk for complicated reasons. And they're doing so in very small groups, of two or three or four. They're not necessarily creating large institutional structures to do this work. And again, it makes them extremely flexible, and it lets them direct aid exactly where it's needed, when it's needed, to give what is needed, because they're filling orders from people in Ukraine that they have been in contact with.

So when the dam broke and Kherson flooded, everyone I knew who had been driving aid into Ukraine packed a van and ran to bring clean drinking water, and electrical generators, and dry clothes, and all of this sort of thing, to people who were victims of flooding. And the international NGOs responded again very, very slowly. You could see that the IOM,[12] at the end of the first week, started bringing in some bottled water. It was a very limited response, which the IOM says it is doing via its local partners. But if the local partners are doing the work of sourcing and distribution, what do you need the IOM for? I think most Ukrainians would agree that the international aid agencies have been almost completely useless. And they were again, and this time they have no excuse of saying "who could have predicted a war?" There's been a war for fourteen, fifteen months. And they're still unprepared.

IH: Do you think that this new type of humanitarianism, and the fact that it's very visible that INGOs are inefficient, can impact or

challenge the whole humanitarian industry?

ED: Well, I think there are three ways it impacts the humanitarian industry. One way has to do with the function that aid agencies have. You know that one of the primary functions of a large international aid agency for the past 70 years has been logistics, right? What they're good at is sourcing identical goods in huge quantities and moving them across dangerous spaces. But now, particularly in the Ukrainian case, because of the availability of the internet, you're seeing that individual donors can donate not to a large INGO, but to the guy they know from across the street who's got a van and, you know, you can give him $300 and he'll go and buy whatever's needed, throw it in his van and drive it across to Ukraine. So, I think if that's happening, what's the use of an international NGO? What does the International Organization for Migration do at this point? They don't run camps, they're not doing large-scale logistics, it's just more efficient to go around them, and I think that's what most people think. The international aid community is really struggling to understand its own role. If it's not basically the equivalent of Walmart[13] that's a logistics specialist, what is it? What do they do? What's their added value? I think if you look at UNHCR, UNHCR itself is not sure what value it brings to a conflict like Ukraine. It's an identity crisis for them.

The second question has to do with the availability of markets. Traditional humanitarian aid is premised on the idea that there is no functioning market where they're going, but in fact, except in the most dire circumstances, there is almost always a functioning market. And that's particularly true in long-term refugee situations. It's particularly true in urban refugee situations. It's particularly true in IDP situations, where people are going to other parts of the country that still have infrastructure. So, I think the aid agencies have really tried to think hard about what their role is when the easiest thing to move is money. And people can get what they need on a functioning market. UNHCR,

for example, at first tried to keep the market out of its operations. Look, for example, at huge camps like Kakuma[14] in Kenya. Kakuma was a closed camp, and at first they prohibited local people from bringing merchandise to sell there. One of my colleagues, Marnie Thompson,[15] has worked in a camp in Tanzania[16] which was also closed, and the locals were forbidden from selling produce there, which left the refugees to depend on World Food Program packages. But that's not tenable when you have 8.5 million people. So, I think UNHCR has been thinking very carefully about the role it can play in situations with functioning markets. And they're trying a lot to think about how to move money. I think here in Poland they gave out Visa cards. In Ukraine, they also gave out Visa cards. They've experimented with blockchain. But is what they're going to do shift from being a logistics provider of goods, like a not-for-profit Walmart, into not-for-profit bankers? What does this mean for what they are?

And then the third big challenge, I think, has to do with the way that money is now flowing around the INGOs. I'll give you an example. My mom. God love my mom, right? My mom really wanted to help out in Ukraine. At first, she wanted to donate to the International Committee of the Red Cross. And I was like, Ma, the ICRC is doing nothing, don't waste your money. And so, eventually, my mom did donate, at first to Ukrainian NGOs that had an institutional structure – Razom,[17] and the Kiev School of Economics also quickly set up a foundation. But then my mom got really into finding ways to contribute aid and also contribute to the war effort in ways that circumvented institutional structures. So, she got really into signmyrocket.com. Have you seen signmyrocket.com?

IH: No.

ED: Okay, so signmyrocket.com lets you buy a rocket. And then the soldiers will write whatever you want on it and then lob it at the Russians. My mom would call me up. She's like, "let's write

something really funny!" And then the soldiers write it with a magic marker on the rocket. And then they take a picture and they send the picture back to you as proof that your personal rocket was fired at the Russians. And my mother would call me – "Oh, I bought a big one today. I bought one of the really big ones!" So, I think the existence of these new fundraising channels where individuals are building networks of trust, and then running large dollar volumes through these personal networks without ever passing through an institution, that to me is profoundly new. The Ukrainians did this during Maidan, but I've never seen it in an international aid situation before. And I think it's genius. Ukrainians, I mean particular Ukrainian volunteers, are still raising a lot of money. I put out a call on my own Facebook page, and I said, "yeah, I'm going to the border, throw me a couple of bucks if you want me to give it to refugees". And I expected I'd get what I usually get when I put out a call, which is about $1,000, maybe $1,300. I got $68,000.

NJ: To give directly to refugees?

ED: Yes. Actually, giving it directly to refugees ended up being extremely complicated. What I ended up doing was giving it to volunteers who were transporting people or bringing aid. At one point, I met a historian who was about to deliver a book to the publisher when, as he was fleeing, his laptop got ruined. So I bought him a new laptop. And it was a really amazing experience to be able to provide what was needed when it was needed. So I think that's something that's profoundly new and a real challenge to what the international aid agencies do. Because they were the focal point for both government-donated money and individual-donated money, and they're not anymore.

NJ: I remember that, a few months after the beginning of the war, the Polish government found a solution, and started donating not to the Ukrainian refugees but the people who were hosting them.

ED: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What was it, 60 zloty a day or something? 40 zloty a day? Paying their hosts to host them. In that sense, the government just capitulated to the fact that it was not the provider of aid and security. And that's really interesting, because I think there are two interesting things that are happening simultaneously. The first is, of course, that humanitarian and military aid are getting all mixed up together, and the traditional distinction between them has been erased. But the second one is that, in general, states claim to be the organizers of large social projects like humanitarian aid for millions of people, or states claim that they have the only legitimate use of the means of violence, and they are the providers of the means of violence. And now, if you have my 81-year-old mother buying rockets on signmyrocket.com, what does that tell you about the role of the state in providing defense and of having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence? It means that capacity is being eroded, and that war itself is in many ways being crowdsourced. That, to me, is profoundly new, and it says something about the weakness of states. So the Polish government capitulates and realizes that all they can do is inject money into the system to keep the hosts hosting longer. That is, it's injecting liquidity into the personal, self-organized networks that exist. And they also did give money to the Ukrainians, right? Because when they gave them PESEL numbers, they started giving them, what is it, 500 zloty a month? It was routing money directly to the Ukrainians, which took a while but was helpful. But I think in both cases, they had given up their role as the organizer of these large social projects. And that's something quite new, that says something about the incapacity of states.

NJ: Talking about this incapacity of states. A few weeks ago you visited the Polish–Belarusian border. You met activists who provide humanitarian assistance in the forest. Are your conclusions about what you called the "new type of humanitarianism" you observed on the Ukrainian border also relevant to this context?

ED: In some ways, yes. You know, Hugo Slim, who's a commentator on humanitarian aid, wrote a short piece about volunteerism, in which he drew all the wrong conclusions, but he had a great label for it, which was "resistant humanitarianism."[18] And resistant humanitarianism is aid which rejects the principle of neutrality. This is one of the ICRC's key founding principles of humanitarianism. And the principle of neutrality says that aid providers don't take sides, because for them all human lives are of equal value. And resistant humanitarians in many ways say that that's not true. So people who are providing mixed humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine are not providing it to Russia, right? They are seeing their aid, their humanitarian gift, as a contribution to the war effort.

The volunteers on the Polish–Belarusian border are also resistant humanitarians. Here, they are obviously acting against the Polish state. They're resisting the Polish state's attempt to create a differential value of life. But I think they are also rejecting the principle of neutrality, of the same aid for everybody. And they are trying to assign a value, a high value, to the lives of people who are trying to cross the border. I think that that's really important, that we're now seeing lots of forms of self-organized aid that reject the principles of impartiality and neutrality.

And the interesting thing on the Ukrainian border is that the

people providing aid are both for the state and against the state. They're for helping the war effort, but they are smuggling, avoiding taxation, bringing in prohibited items, which is against the state. So it's this kind of circumvention of the state to help a state which they see as incompetent. Whereas on the Polish–Belarusian border, it is outright opposition to the state. But to have humanitarianism which is against the state, which takes sides, this is the constant tension in humanitarianism. And that has been a tension since the founding of Doctors Without Borders,[19] which split off from the ICRC in the 70s, precisely because the ICRC would not take a stand on one side of a conflict. So I think it's really important that we start to think of humanitarianism not as a political action, but as decidedly political action that it is always and forever imbricated with the state and with state projects, whether by aiding them or opposing them. We cannot think of humanitarianism as somehow apart from the state. It is always bound to the state.

IH: You mentioned that there are some similarities in this resistant humanitarianism on both borders, Polish–Belarusian and Polish–Ukrainian. But we know that the scale of the voluntarism and support was different. You've been coming to this region for many, many years. How do you understand this difference? Why was the response so different?

ED: Well, because on one border, providing humanitarian aid aligned with state projects. And on the other border, it opposed state projects. There's a difference. But in both cases, interestingly, it challenges again the state's monopoly of violence. The state's right to enact, the state's right to deem some lives as more valuable than others. And the state's right to either cause people's death or simply let them die. And so opposing that in both cases creates a really complicated nexus of value that the state itself doesn't know how to contend with. I think the scale difference is because on one side it was encouraged, or at least allowed to happen; on the other side, it was prohibited. And

people are risk-averse. And there are many people in Poland who are willing to agree with the Polish state that Ukrainian lives are worth more than Syrian lives, or worth more than Afghan lives. But there are many people who are disputing that.

NJ: Yes, so in your article about the unfree labor of refugees in the meatpacking industry in the USA, you wrote, and I quote, "capitalism itself is dependent for its functioning on the production of human difference and relations of inequality. And it produces those relations through ideologies of race and racism."[20]

How is this difference produced on the Polish eastern borders?

ED: Well, race and citizenship status is also what we talk about there. You asked about the difference in scale. Why would the Polish government let in millions of Ukrainians, but bar Syrians, Afghans, Ethiopians? I think some of this is about labor markets. You know, Poland suffers now from the curse of the European Union, which is that you have a population which is getting older and older, and you have increasing labor market demands that cannot be met by your own population. Those labor market demands are for very unskilled labor – people picking strawberries, people working in meatpacking plants. And if you want that kind of labor, then it's... sure, admit Syrians. I mean, the Polish government rumor has it there's a plan now to admit 400,000 immigrants a year on temporary visas, but these are people from Pakistan, Nepal, you know, places that are not seen... people who are not seen as racially the same as the Polish citizenry. The reason that the EU was so happy to see Ukrainians coming in was not that they were white, but that they were skilled, and that the amount of skilled and semi-skilled labor coming in met a real demand, particularly in Poland and in Germany.

For example, in 2015, Germany took in a million Syrians and Afghans and other people. The German government set up programs to try and educate Syrians and Afghans, teach them the language, and give them enough skills so that they could work

in high-tech factories, particularly in the automobile sector. Germany set up these enormously complicated sort of training facilities where, in order to receive support from the government, immigrants had to take German classes, civics classes – which were political ideology classes – and eventually get trained and certified to occupy more skilled positions in the German labor market. And that turned out not to work as well as they had hoped. Syria is a middle-income country; there were a lot of fairly well-educated people, but among the refugee population not all were necessarily well-educated. And teaching Syrians to occupy those roles in the labor market did not happen as fast as they were needed. So Ukrainians, many of whom already speak English or another foreign language, many of whom have experience in Ukraine's very well-developed IT sector, many of whom have experience in Ukraine's very well-developed medical sector – they are in many ways the perfect workers. If you have a labor market that's demanding semi-skilled and skilled labor, admitting Ukrainians is like a dream come true. So I think that was the difference, rather than necessarily race or religion.

NJ: Sometimes in the forest on the Polish–Belarusian border we find documents of people on the move left after the pushbacks. The medical diplomas or graduation photographs between the family photos. And we know that people carry them not to maybe make the asylum application easier, but to work in a profession. I was also thinking about the Lepper laws from the beginning of the 2000s...[21]

ED: I remember Andrzej Lepper. I interviewed him once; he was crazy...

NJ: ...when he made the changes in the law and shortened the procedure of applying for job visas for people from both Ukraine and Belarus. Actually, there is a long tradition of people from Ukraine and Belarus working in Poland in less-skilled professions.

ED: Well, because recertification is a problem, people tend to

drop down a level or two when they come. But in the post-Soviet population, particularly right after the fall of the Berlin Wall, you had an enormous amount of unemployed labor in those countries. And those people were skilled: they were doctors, they were accountants, they were… and so, sure, you bring them in. It's hard to recertify a surgeon, but you can have a surgeon recertify as a nurse, and you can have a nurse recertify as a healthcare aid, helping old people, and you reinsert that person and their skills back into a capitalist labor market. It's interesting that at the same time large multinational corporations were coming into, well, Poland first, but then Ukraine, Belarus, Russia itself, in search of those workers. So the company is moving its investment to the place where those workers are, while there's a parallel movement of admitting those workers into territories which have been made into part of the capitalist heartland. The movement of, what, 1.6 million Ukrainians into Poland before the war was entirely driven by labor market dynamics. And it turns out to be easier to move the people to the workplace than the workplace to the people.

IH: And that's why we ask this question about capitalism, because usually when we talk about differences in response on both borders, we talk about racism. And Ukrainians are kind of these neighbors who "look similar." But at the same time, Poland and Polish people have been and still are extremely prejudiced toward Ukrainians.

ED: Of course – I mean, when this first happened and everyone said, well, Ukrainians are white, I thought: race works differently in different parts of the world, and certainly Ukrainians are being constituted as racial Others in Russia. If you listen to Russian state television, the racism just spewing out of those commentators' mouths really shows that they see Ukrainians as racially different. So don't assume that whiteness works the same way everywhere. And certainly the rise of anti-Ukrainian prejudice that I have heard about in the last six months in Poland

shows that race and nationality are very fluid and flexible things. The same person who was a neighbor who had a culture very similar to yours last February, or two Februarys ago, now all of a sudden is seen as completely different. I'll give you an example. When I was in Warsaw, I heard some comments in my circle about the aesthetics of Ukrainians that some find offensive. When Poles finally started to look "European," women having a "clean girl" look instead of highly lacquered nails and smearing on makeup, men finally dressing in neutral colors and wearing casual wear, Ukrainians came. It was like a rollback. Like they were rolling Poland back, aesthetically, to the 90s, or pre-90s. And that their otherness, their signaling of a different aesthetic sense, would pull Poland back toward Russia and make it post-Soviet again, when Poland had finally escaped that label of being post-socialist, post-Soviet, and had become European. And so the very idea of guys running around in turquoise shorts and women with big nails and, you know, glossy red nails and fake eyelashes and lip filler – for some, this was a whole culturally laden field in which Ukrainians were Other, and they were making Poles like them. Is that racism? I mean, what's race is the real question here. Race is not something that inheres, embodies, right? Race is a category of difference. So here you have somebody who is not using traditional categories of race, and yet is marking Ukrainians as profoundly Other.

IH: The production of difference, like you said, can be dynamic and change very often. Now, to close, we would like to go back to what you already mentioned about the state trying to resort to power, but also the state kind of giving up. So when you visited us and you participated in the international seminar,[22] you witnessed the militarization of the area...

ED: Indeed, we did.

IH: Exactly. I mean, it was a very physical experience of being stopped by undercover police...

ED: Yes, and again, thank you for stopping me from getting in

trouble because – you can put this in the interview – they were clearly looking for migrants. And I was like holding up my passport saying, "you want a migrant? Here, I'm a migrant."

NJ: Actually, nothing would have happened if you did, you know?

ED: Yeah, except that I would have been abrasive and rude and gotten us in trouble.

NJ: No… you are white enough.

IH: But yeah, you had this experience. We also went to the wall, which we perceive as the materialization of violence and the tool of torture. But technically, one year ago, the whole state of exception, state of emergency, was lifted. Still, militarization is visible. In the past few days we could see the helicopters again. There are way more soldiers in the forest at the moment. That's why, when we were recently there, there were almost zero humanitarian interventions for a few days. We don't know exactly why, but probably one of the reasons is that the state put all the forces there again.

ED: Sure, it's summer. The forest won't kill people in the summer. So the state can't let the terrain do its work for it. The state has to do it directly.

IH: But people are still crossing and still dying – you visited the cemetery with the grave of a person on the move, but also saw the items of those who had successfully continued their journey. Has the state of exception really ended? The state of exception understood in a more abstract way? And what is this state actually doing? Is it real control?

ED: Damn, that's making me sort of think through Agamben in careful ways. I think the notion of the state of exception[23] as being a distinct time period or place is itself a very statist notion – it is the point of view of the state. But if you're taking the point of view of the migrant or the helper, you realize that there is no distinct boundary between the state of exception in an Agambenian sense and the Foucauldian control of people through capillary power.[24] So those things bleed into one another, right? Sometimes the violence is done by suspending the rules, and sometimes the violence is done by upholding the rules. And those two things happen intermittently with each other rather than one time period where the rules are suspended and one time period where the rules are upheld. So I think that, instead of thinking about distinct spaces of exception and Foucauldian biopower, what we really need to think about is a range of state techniques. That these are tactics that are being used by the state in different moments, to achieve the same goal in different ways. But that the state actually has a flexible set of tools which it uses to enact its power, rather than separating those two things as distinct moments in time. And, analytically, that should lead us to think about state power differently. Rather than saying "Oh, the state is engaging in biopower" or "the state is engaging in the suspension of the law," we need to start thinking about states as non-homogeneous, non-unitary actors, where different parts of the state operate differently using different tactics at different moments. States are much more flexible than either Foucault or Agamben would have it. So I'm not surprised that you don't have moments of real militarization, but you're also going to have

moments of real bureaucratization. And those two things can happen simultaneously.

IH: Despite using all these tactics, they still don't manage to take full control of the situation, because, as we know, more people on the move are crossing than are being stopped.

ED: Yes, and those people who make it to Germany then enter a very highly bureaucratized system, where they're surveilled, controlled, moved in space, pushed into the labor market in particular ways. There are layers of power and control in the European Union. But, as we learned during the Cold War, there is no state where the power is total. No state has totalitarian power, even if they have totalitarian tendencies or at least totalitarian dreams. But their power is never total. There's always leakage. There are always people who circumvent the state. There are always people who challenge state power overtly, like the helpers in Podlasie do. People who challenge state power by doing end runs around it, like the refugees themselves do in Podlasie. So you have to think again about this as a dynamic dance between state power and people who are opposing state power or circumventing state power, rather than saying that the state is simply failing in its totalitarian mission.

IH: Fortunately for the people who are crossing.

ED: But, you know, I think it's true that more people get through than are stopped, or we think it's true. But it's also true that there are many, many people who never come, because the spectacle of state power has dissuaded them. So what's your estimate of how many people get across in a year – 10,000?

NJ: I think it's more.

ED: Right, but it's not fourteen million. And it's not the one million who walked to Germany in 2015–2016. Certainly, in some sense, state power is working simply by being performative and creating a theater of the border. So, you know, the fact that they miss 10,000 or 15,000 people doesn't negate the fact that they

dissuade a million.

You know, one of the things that activists in Podlasie have done is make suffering visible. And I'm thinking of these horrific pictures of the small children on the other side of the wall, suffering.[25] And those pictures were deliberately circulated by activists for a political purpose. But to what extent does the circulation of those images serve the purposes of the state? If what the state is doing at the border is a kind of political theater, where they are trying to dissuade people from even trying to cross the border by showing that those who try will inevitably suffer, then the circulation of those images makes the activists parastatal actors. They're acting in concert with the state.

I think one of the important things that I would say at the end about humanitarian action is that we very often think of the humanitarian sphere as this purified domain which is somehow free from the state and free from capitalism. And, in fact, it is always deeply entwined with both states and markets. And until we think about it as a parastatal actor and as a market force, as a market actor, I don't think we can understand the way it operates. Either institutionalized humanitarianism or even self-organized humanitarianism.

1 Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, wielkim biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy*, trans. Przemysław Sadura (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2008).

2 Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, *No Path Home: Humanitarian Camps and the Grief of Displacement* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018).

3 Badaczki i Badacze na Granicy [Researchers on the Border] – an informal group of researchers that cooperate to document and analyze the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Since its inception, the main aims of the group are: providing a research base in Podlasie; creating a network of researchers and activists; organizing monthly seminars; organizing and keeping track of ongoing research; creating the Humanitarian Crisis Archive; providing field support for researchers; and running popular-science activities.

4 Dunn, *No Path Home*.

5 Internally Displaced Persons – "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 1998, 7, https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/199808-training-OCHA-guiding-principles-Eng2.pdf.

6 This figure comes from a 2004 UNHCR report: "It is estimated that the average duration of major refugee situations, protracted or not, has increased: from 9 years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003." UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), EC/54/SC/C: *Protracted Refugee Situations*, 2004, 2, https://www.unhcr.org/40c982172.pdf. This data has been widely criticized as unreliable (see: https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/how-many-years-do-refugees-stay-exile?), but at the same time it still appears in contemporary studies on the length of time spent in camps.

7 INGOs – International Non-Governmental Organizations.

8 Wojciech Bakun, mayor of the city of Przemyśl since 2018, member of the Sejm, businessman and politician.

9 Jason De León – anthropologist, border and migration scholar, author of *The Land of Open Graves* (2015), devoted to the analysis of the border regime practices that use the landscape to harm or kill people on the move on the US–Mexican border.

10 Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

11 Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Iwona Kaliszewska, "Distributed humanitarianism: Volunteerism and aid to refugees during the Russian invasion of Ukraine," *American Ethnologist* vol. 50, no. 1 (2023); Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Iwona Kaliszewska, "Crisis as potential for collective action: Violence and humanitarianism on the Polish-Ukrainian border," *Anthropology Today* vol. 39, no. 2 (2023).

12 The International Organization for Migration – established in 1951, with 175 member countries. As it states on its webpage, the IOM "works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration to promote international cooperation on migration

issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people." https://www.iom.int/who-we-are.

13 American supermarket chain, established in 1962, considered one of the cheapest stores in the US.

14 Established in 1992, refugee camp with a population of almost 200,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers at the end of July 2020, see: https://www.unhcr.org/ke/kakuma-refugee-camp.

15 Marnie Thompson, assistant professor of anthropology at Fort Lewis College.

16 Christina Clark-Kazak and Marnie Jane Thomson, "Refugees' Roles in Resettlement from Uganda and Tanzania: Agency, Intersectionality, and Relationships," in: *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement and Building Peace: Beyond Beneficiaries*, eds. Megan Bradley, James Milner, and Blair Peruniak (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 211–228, http://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfrxq90.16.

17 Razom [ENG. Together] – Ukrainian human rights NGO established in 2014 in response to the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, to gather Ukrainian diaspora in the US to support the struggle of Ukrainians. After Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the organization began to collect money to support direct subjects and activities.

18 Hugo Slim, "Humanitarian resistance. Its ethical and operational importance," Network Paper, *Humanitarian Practice Network* (HPN) no. 87 (2022).

19 Doctors Without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – established in 1971 in France in response to the war in Nigeria. The main aim was to deliver medical aid independently of hosting governments, in places where it is needed. In 1999, the organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

20 Shae Frydenlund and Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, "Refugees and racial capitalism: Meatpacking and the primitive accumulation of labor," *Political Geography* vol. 95 (October 2021), 5

21 Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on amending the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on the principles of passenger traffic, signed in Kiev on July 30, 2003, signed in Warsaw on November 30, 2007. The agreements simplify visa procedures for Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens to work, e.g. in the agricultural industry.

22 Researchers on the Border [Badaczki i Badacze na Granicy] International Seminar, April 21–23, 2023.

23 Giorgio Agamben, *Stan wyjątkowy*, trans. Monika Surma-Gawłowska (Warsaw: Ha!art, 2009).

24 Michel Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia*, trans. Tadeusz Komendant (Warsaw: Aletheia, 1998).

25 Elizabeth Dunn refers to the situation from the end of May 2023, when a group of people on the move, mostly children, approached the border wall and, while standing on Polish ground but still on the other side of the fence, tried to apply for asylum. As in the situation from August 2021 in Usnarz, Polish uniformed services ignored this, and let the group stay on the other side of the barrier. See: https://www.voanews.com/a/migrants-with-children-stuck-at-poland-s-border-wall-activists-say-belarus-won-t-let-them-turn-back-/7113349.html.

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